

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

Tobacco, Trade, and No Entanglements *John Jay as Foreign Minister*

- Standard: III. People, Places, and Environments
V. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
IX. Global Connections
- Grade Level: 9–12
- Objectives: The student will:
- Analyze primary documents
 - Evaluate foreign policy efforts in the 1780s
 - Determine appropriate foreign policy actions by John Jay
- Time: 1–2 class periods (see Optional Activities)
- Materials: Documents: **1784** *The Prussians Desire Tobacco*
1785 *Few Advantages of an Intimate Connection*
1781 *Excerpts from the Articles of Confederation*
- Resources: *A Letter from John Jay*
Key Players under the Articles of Confederation
Images of John Jay and the Fraunces Tavern
- Procedures:

Setting the Stage

John Jay served as the Secretary of Foreign Affairs from 1784 to 1789 under the Confederation Congress and as interim Secretary of State (for the newly named Department of State) under Thomas Jefferson, arrived to take the position in 1790. He managed his small department, consisting of a few clerks and a handful of overseas diplomats, from his office in the Fraunces Tavern in New York City, then the capital of the United States. The tavern was rented to the new government and housed the Departments of War, Treasury, and Foreign Affairs.

1. Have students to work in pairs.
2. Explain that they are sitting at their desks in the persona of John Jay, Secretary of Foreign Affairs (Foreign Minister) of the United States. One student portrays Jay and the other is one of Jay's clerks.
3. Show the class pictures of Fraunces Tavern and of John Jay.

4. Two letters need Jay's reply.

- Distribute one letter, *The Prussians Desire Tobacco*, to half of the pairs. With this letter, John Jay will respond to the Baron de Thuilemeyer of Prussia.
- The other letter, *Few Advantages of an Intimate Connection* goes to the remaining pairs. Jay's reply to this letter will be to William Stephens Smith.
- Give each pair of students a copy of the *Excerpts from the Articles of Confederation*.

Each student portraying John Jay, with the assistance of his clerk, must decide how to respond to the letter, bearing in mind the powers of the national government as stated in the Articles of Confederation. For example, what can Jay do if he wants to make a trade agreement with Prussia? Does the Articles of Confederation give him powers to do so? Must there be additional approval from Congress? From the states?

Have the clerk refer to the Articles of Confederation to confirm the powers Jay may use in his dealings with other countries. (The teacher may direct clerks specifically to Articles VI and IX.)

5. Show the image of a letter written by Jay. The students should use the same format for their newly created letters, with the Office for Foreign Affairs, New York City, and the date at the top of the page. The salutation and closing should be similar.

6. Provide students with the historical background of the letters, with brief explanations of specific events and identification of people involved. Also, remind students that they represent the United States as its primary diplomat and that proper diplomatic etiquette should be reflected in the letters.

7. Allow 15 minutes for all John Jays, with assistance from their clerks, to draft rough copies of their letters.

8. Have students form groups of four: two John Jays and their clerks with groupings based on specific letters: *The Prussians Desire Tobacco* or *Few Advantages of an Intimate Connection*. Review the rough drafts of letters and work together to create a final product. Allow 10 minutes.

9. Have students form groups of 4 x 4, including a group of four with the drafted letter to the Prussians combined with a group of four with drafted letter to William Stephens Smith. Share and read letters. Have each group note similarities and differences among the letters. Determine if the letters are realistic and, from all appearances, accurate. Allow 15 minutes.

10. Ask students to return to their original seats. Have each 4x4 group summarize the content of both letters. Determine from each group report the commonalities and differences of Jay's responses. Select (by teacher or class vote) the most effectively crafted and realistic letters from the two groups. Why do they convey the information in a more "diplomatic" way than the other letters?

11. Discuss:

- a.** From this short introduction to John Jay's job as Secretary of Foreign Affairs, what were the difficulties he faced?
- b.** Describe, in general, the qualifications Jay had to possess to be the "successful diplomat" that history has considered him.
- c.** Noting that the Articles of Confederation complicated the professional and political lives of government officials like Jay, what other factors (geographic, social, economic) made life more difficult for these officials?
- d.** What advantages and/or disadvantages might the current Secretary of State experience compared to John Jay in 1786?

Extension Activity:

- 1.** Follow the steps listed in Procedures 1–7. Have students read their Jay letters at that point. Discuss their results with Procedures 10–11 for guidance.
- 2.** The teacher will select one or include both letters (from Adams and Smith) to read or display for class to read. Discuss the letters and how Jay might have responded. Refer to Procedures 10–11 for questions if necessary. ■